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Pictures of Berlin

The pale pink flowers flowed softly in the cool Berlin air, the delicate branches swaying softly and slowly, as if any sudden movement in the wind would snap the petite tree’s limbs. My finger pressed down on the metal button of the camera with a faint click sound. I pushed my thick brown hair behind my ear, something I felt like I did a thousand times a day, while smiling softly to myself, happy with the pictures I was able to take. It rains about half the time in Berlin, so clear mornings like these were rare. My eyes gazed over the landscape. The ruins of the Second World War still dotted the city of Berlin sixteen years later in 1961. Most of the crumbling buildings were part of the thousands of apartments destroyed, displacing about a million citizens. The delicate trees, called Sakura trees, dotted the ruins of these buildings, sharply contrasting with them; beauty out of ruin. In Japanese culture, the Sakura trees represent peace and tranquility. The first time I saw them in the Berlin landscape, I was instantly in love. I took one last look at the orange and red sunrise before shouldering my camera and climbing down the stairs from the top of the apartment building’s roof.

“Jacqueline, you’re going to be late to school!” My father’s voice greeted me from the open door.

He shoved a school bag and lunch pail in my arms and hurried me out the door. His hair was frazzled as usual, and his other hand held the familiar CanonFlex camera. I laughed to myself as I stepped out onto the streets. My father was a little crazy, as all artists tend to be. He was so crazy to the point where he moved to a foreign country to photograph the rebuilding of Berlin after the war, dragging his 18 year old daughter with him. Normal teenagers would be livid if their fathers uprooted their entire lives for a couple of photographs. I was elated. A new city meant new adventures to go on, new people to meet, and new pictures to snap. My daydreaming was soon interrupted as I checked the time on my watch. I moved my feet a little faster towards the white building of Freie Universität, I couldn’t be late for the 3rd time this month.

*“August 12th, 1961.*

*Die Sukar Bäume im Wind flossen , meine Augen folgten dem Sonnenaufgang, es war en schöner Morgen..”*

I slowly wrote out the description of the trees in my morning Lit class, my German classmates racing ahead of me.

“Jacqueline. It’s *ein,* not *en.*”

I looked up into the face of my classmate, Klaus Meiser. His blonde hair was swept to the side, and his piercing blue eyes inspected my poor writing. In one hand he held a pencil, in the other, he held Harper Lee’s popular American novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird.* Each student in the class was fully versed in both English and German, a trait I was not blessed to have.

“*Danke* Klaus.” I mumbled.

I looked over at his desk, his English was immaculately written. He was easily the best student in the class, along with the best looks. Just about every girl in the class had a crush on him, myself included. But he was not perfect, his circumstances made him undesirable. Him, along with a few others at the University, lived in East Berlin, the part of the city where the Soviets controlled the government. Each day spent in the Western controlled part of the city was not guaranteed, and it got more dangerous everyday as tensions rose between the Western and Eastern powers within Berlin.

I checked my left wrist, 15:00 German time. I stuffed my bag with books and took out my camera, hanging it around my neck. Students bustled out of the different buildings, greeting friends, smiles on their faces. I snapped a couple pictures. I gazed around, looking for the next best shot. My eyes landed on the Sakura trees on the edge of the campus. Klaus sat there, fingering the little petals that flittered down from the tree as he read his book. The scene was picturesque, the colors vibrantly molded together as the light caught his face at just the right time as I snapped the picture. I turned around quickly before he spotted me and started to walk back to the familiar apartment building.

The cool air of the city caressed my hair as I sat on the top of the roof. My eyes gazed over the developed pictures of today. The one of Klaus in the midst of the Sukar trees was easily my favorite. I slipped the delicate frame into a scrapbook, writing the date on the corner. I then gathered my things; the temperature had dropped dramatically in a span of five minutes. I climbed carefully down into the small room from the ladder on the roof and was greeted by snores. My father had passed out on his desk, his pictures from today were clasped in one hand, a cup of coffee in the other. I grabbed the coffee and the delicate picture and set them on the counter next to the numerous photo albums and then placed a thick woolen blanket over his shoulders while nestling a pillow under his head. I climbed into bed with thoughts of petals and blonde heads.

My feet cracked as I stretched out, awoken by yet another beautiful and rare orange sunrise. My peace was short lived.

“Jacqueline, we gotta go. Get your things. Get your things!” My father frantically ordered.

“What? Why?” My eyebrows knitting in confusion.

I gazed out the window to find a possible source for my father’s frantic ramblings. I saw nothing but the usual construction, a little louder than usual. My father shoved a newspaper in my face. The headline blared:

**“AUGUST 13TH, 1961:THE WALL. ULBRICHT’S WAY TO SEPARATE THE EAST AND THE WEST”.**

I read on a little. The East Berlin leader, Walter Ulbricht, had ordered the creation of a fortified wall between West and East Berlin to dissipate the immigration of East Berliners escaping from the Soviet controlled city. The article noted that the Wall was planned to be 7 and a half miles long, and 12 feet high, 4 feet wide at its completion. Behind it, on the East Berlin side, there was going to be a “Death Strip” equipped with snarling dogs, vicious guards, machine guns, and soft sand to show trespassers. For now, it was concrete slabs and barbed wire. I drummed my fingers on the table, lost in thought as to why this Wall was so extreme. I reached my conclusion as I recalled a particular history lesson in school. Tensions between the Soviets and the Western powers had been growing for decades. In 1948, the Soviet leaders created a blockade in Berlin in an attempt to starve out the Western allies. In June 1961, the failed Vienna Summit added distrust and more anger between the two powers due to its unresolved issues regarding nuclear weapons. Finally, the 89,000 East Berlin immigrants racing to West Berlin seemed to be final straw with Ulbricht. With all this information buzzing around in my mind, I ran out of the house, hoping my classmates had more answers.

I was instantly swarmed by students waving that very same newspaper in my face once I arrived at the bustling University. My eyes glanced around. I saw Josephine, Maura, Frank...but no Klaus. I took deep breaths, shutting my eyes tight. “He’s just a boy, Jacque, you barely even know him,” I thought to myself, trying to slow my racing mind down. I ran across the campus towards the other classes, poking my head in, hearing snippets of conversations, but not seeing that familiar blonde head. My classmates milled around me as they gathered their bags to leave. The amount of activity in Berlin was too much for there to be class today. I walked out into the courtyard and I glanced towards the Sakura trees only to be disappointed. Klaus really was stuck in East Berlin.

I opened the door to the apartment and saw that most everything had been boxed up.

“Dad? Dad! Where are we going?” I yelled out.

My father appeared in the room, his camera hanging from his neck and files in his hand.

“Home. It’s too dangerous here. Our flight’s in a week. I’ve boxed just about everything but some food, clothes and such, and the cameras.”

“Dad, do we have to go? Like really, do we have to?” I pleaded.

“Honey, yes we really do. The city is beautiful, but the people? Not so much. It takes a lot of hate in someone to refuse a citizen access to the entirety of its city.”

I nodded my head. My dad did have a point. Americans in Berlin during the midst of the Cold War was a dangerous position; the Wall was just the right push to get us out of Germany. I walked over to the stairway and climbed up to the only comforting thing in my life at the moment, the rooftop. I gazed over my temporary but beloved city. The sun had just began to set, light still highlighted parts of the scenery. I heard drills buzzing as construction workers began to resurrect the devastating Wall. I was then suddenly wrapped in a huge comfy mass of fleece.

“Jacque, get to bed. It’s freezing.” My father softly whispered to me.

I took his outstretched hand and escaped into the warm room from the coldness that had settled on the city.

*Click. Click. Click.* My fingers pressed quickly three times on the metal button on the camera. The city I had grown to love over the past few months had completely left. The Sakura trees were replaced with barbed wire and guards. The peace had left and tension had come knocking on the doors of the citizens. I pressed the camera to my eyes again to document the Wall that crudely interrupted my view of the city from the roof. *Click.*

“JACQUELINE!” A German voice shouted from below.

“*Ja*?” I questionly called back out.

“*Komm runter*.” The voice replied.

I racked my brain for a second, what did that mean again? Ah, come down. Right. I hurried down the stairs to the streets, and then looked around for the source of the voice.

“Jacqueline! Hi, it is me, Maura. From Lit.”

“Oh! *Hallo*…” I tentatively said.

My German classmates never sought me out. More of them rounded the corner, all murmuring “*Hallo*’s” and greeting each other. I recognized only a few, and even though I knew deep in my heart I wouldn’t find the one person I wanted to, my eyes still glanced around the crowd looking for that telltale blonde hair.

With waving hands, Maura shouted above the dim of talking teenagers, “*Folge mir*!” and began to walk towards the Tierpark Zoo.

The crowd followed her. Was I the only one who had no idea what was happening? I shook my head in confusion as I was engulfed with German conservations and unfamiliar faces. It was a short walk to the Zoo, which had recently been built in 1955. Maura stood up onto a bench and waved her hands around again.

“Alright everyone! *Hallo*. I’m speaking in English for Jacqueline. Yes? Okay?” She asked my classmates.

“Oh, great.” I mumbled to myself, my face turning as red as an apple.

Everyone nodded their heads in agreement.

“Well. As we all know, a Wall has been built. Or as the Eastern citizens call it, “*Antifaschistischer Schutzwall*”. Unfortunately, Ulbricht has ordered that no one escapes from either part of the city to the other on punishment of death. And even worse, a few students are stranded in East Berlin. So, a few of us have a plan to get Klaus, Edith, Bonnie, and Ada out of East Berlin and into West Berlin through the sewers.” Most of the crowd’s hands shot up the moment she shut her mouth. “Yes. I know. A million questions. Frank? Come explain”.

Maura climbed down from the bench as a brown haired, blue eyed boy climbed up.

“Uh, *hallo* everyone. Well, my dad works in the sewers, so I pretty much know them by heart.” Frank rustled in his bag and pulled out a couple of papers. “So I brought some maps, and drew on suggested routes through the sewers to different parts of the city. I figured the sooner, the better. That Wall seems more dangerous every minute longer it stands.”

Heads bobbed in agreement all around me. I tentatively raised my hand.

“Wait. So how are we going to do this?”

Maura stood back up to answer, “Well, Frank and I have divided the twenty of us into groups of five, each group is assigned either Klaus, Edith, Bonnie, or Ada. We’ll spend tonight studying the maps, and then move in tomorrow night after the sun rises.”

“So what are the groups?” A voice shouted out.

“Alright, me, David, Edna, Josephine, and Danielle are with Ada.” Frank began as he listed the groups. “And with Klaus-”

My head perked up.

“-Maura, Jacqueline, Adam, Fritz, and Freja. We’ll meet back at the Zoo at 19:00. Let’s make this work people. *Für Berlin! Für Rechten! Für den Frieden!*” He shouted.

For Berlin. For rights. For peace. What a quick turnaround this day had become.

I led my group to the rooftop of my apartment. We talked for hours. It was decided that once we got into East Berlin, I was to find Klaus. Maura wrote down his house number and left it in my bag. I waved goodbye solemnly, my mind racing. Once I had gotten the escapee, I was to return quickly and safely into the sewers to meet the others guarding the entrance. So much could go wrong. I climbed into my safe, cozy bed and fell asleep to the comforting sound of my father’s ignorant and blissful snoring.

*Click.* I snapped the last picture I would take in Berlin. The Sakura trees were no longer my muse, but the monster that wrapped around the city beckoned to my camera. I was surprised when drops of water plopped onto my head. It was the first day it had rained in a while and added to my foreboding mood. I climbed down from the rooftop to find that my father had written a note.

*Jacqueline,*

*I won’t be home today, and will most likely be back around 22:00. If you need me, I’ll be at the US Embassy filling out some paperwork so we can get back to America sooner than expected. Be safe, and snap some good memories for me.*

*Love,*

*Dad.*

Well, that made it easier. No parent to worry about my whereabouts today. But I didn’t have a chance to tell him I loved him. What if something went wrong today? What if those hostile-looking Dobermans guarding the wall caught me? I shook my head of the worry. I slipped into a warm, brown flannel, simple blue jeans, and black boots. I grabbed my black raincoat and placed it on my shoulders. As a final detail, I knotted my hair into a bun. I looked like normal me. Short, skinny, normal brown hair and eyes, pale skin, nothing like a would be convict. I shoved the cleverly drawn maps into my brown pack, along with an apple and my camera. I looked around the apartment. Was I missing something? My eyes searched the room until they landed on my scrapbook. My fingers flipped over the pages to the picture of Klaus in the trees. I shoved it into my bag with no hesitation; my two favorite things in Berlin forever immortalized in a square piece of film. Klaus. Sakura trees. Two things the wall took away from me. I gazed over the other pictures and delicately took out a picture my dad had taken of me on the rooftop awhile ago. I smiled to myself and also placed it in my bag. I ran out the door, my watch read 18:30.

I hurried over to the Zoo. Most everyone was there from what I could tell.

“Alright! *Hallo*! Welcome! Are we ready? Please find your groups. Time is wasting. Be safe!” Maura yelled out.

Our group assembled. Maura talked over the game plan. We were ready. We all walked quickly and quietly to our sewer entrance.

“Alright. Well Fritz, you lead. Adam, you have the back. Jacque, do you have the house number?” Maura asked.

I pulled out the wrinkled note from my bag.

“Yes, *17 Norden Lane*. He lives on the 1st floor, second door to the right.” I replied.

Our group continued to walk through the sewer. I nearly threw up my breakfast as the stench rose to my nostrils. I picked up the pace a little, the deafening silence adding to my anxiety. And finally, we reached the other side. I took a couple deep breaths. It was time. With a nod from Maura, I turned the lever of the sewage door. I stepped into the East Berlin side. Pelting rain greeted me, dampening my clothes. It was now or never, no looking back. I walked away quickly, thankfully everyone was eating supper at this time. I looked around, things here were more old-fashioned, less “Westernized”. I read the street signs and saw that Norden Lane was to my left. With a brisk pace, I arrived at the door of 17 Norden Lane. I let myself in the building, pausing to knock on the second door to the right.

“*Hallo*?” A voice inquired.

“*Hallo,* Klaus. It’s me, Jacqueline from Lit class.” I replied back.

The door opened. His blue eyes were filled with confusion and a little bit of interest.

“Jacqueline! Hi! Er- What are you doing here?” His eyebrows knitted together as he spoke.

I stepped through the doorway into the quaint little room, there were books stacked on the side of the bed, and newspapers littered the ground. The sky was dark outside the window, and the only source of light was the lamp by the bed.

I dug out the map as I answered, “Well, Maura and Frank organized a search party for East Berlin students. And I was assigned to you. Freja, Adam, Fritz, and Maura are waiting in the sewers for us to get back. You ready?”

Klaus nodded his head, understanding in his eyes. He grabbed a backpack off the hanger and shoved a pair of boots, jeans, two t-shirts, and a couple journals into it. He put his wallet into his back pocket and got a flashlight from his bedside drawer.

“Alright, yes I am ready. Are you?” He asked.

“Yes. We have to be quiet, th-the guards are trained to k-kill.” I whispered, a slight tremble in my voice.

He grabbed my hand, squeezing it tight in reassurance. I looked into his deep, blue eyes and felt comfort. There was something about him that made me feel at ease. We slowly walked out the door into the crisp East Berlin air. The rain still pounded the city. I took my hand from his and grabbed the little square of paper from my bag. Placing my finger over my lips, I used my other hand to shove the photograph into his plan. I shook my head at his questioning eyes and grasped his other hand with mine.

“Wait.” He whispered. “Do you hear that?”

I stopped in the middle of the road. I could see the sewer from here. My attention diverted from the metal door to the sound of human footsteps moving very quickly.

“*HÖR AUF*!” The man yelled, his tone not very friendly.

“Klaus, don’t stop, run!” I urgently ordered.

I broke off into a sprint towards the metal door. I turned the lever as fiercely as I could, jumping into the cold, smelly darkness.

Klaus yelled after me, “Jacque, run. I’ll get the door. Run!”

I ran off into the dark. Where were the others? My footsteps quickened as panic began to ensue. The damp clothes that hung on my body chilled my skin while drops of water from my hair plopped onto the cold, hard metal beneath my feet. I heard the soft patter of raindrops hitting the ceiling above my head. I stopped walking while apprehension shivered through my bones. My eyes searched the dark space of the smelly tunnel. I paced around nervously. And then suddenly, my ears perked up at the sound of footsteps running quickly towards me, followed by the faint sound of clicking. My eyes strained to make out the face that got nearer and nearer, and I could faintly see an animal not too far behind it.

“Jacqueline! Run!” The figure yelled out.

My body refused to move. My eyes barely made out the blonde boy running with desperation in his eyes. I then saw what made him run. A guard followed closely behind him, a snarling dog nipping at his heels. My feet then began to move. I ran and ran, and finally saw the end of the sewer. I couldn’t afford to look behind me. My eyes barely made out the group of teenagers gathered at the end of the sewer.

“MAURA! The door! Open the door!” I screamed in desperation.

She frantically screwed open the heavy door, the others diving through. I turned my head to look at Klaus. He was right behind me, a fingertip away, but so was that dog. He stretched out his hands, as if to hold mine.

But instead, he pushed me. He pushed me right through the door. I screamed as I tumbled into the dirt on the other side. It was too late to pull him back in as Fritz’s strong arms shoved the door closed behind me.

“NO. No, no, no. Klaus!” I cried out.

Warm arms encircled me. Fingertips brushed away dirt from my face, and warm blankets covered my shivering body. I closed my eyes, and allowed exhaustion to take over.

I woke to a huddle of teenagers staring at me. Their eyes glistened with worry as they spoke in hushed tones. I sat up slowly, surveying the scene around me. I looked at every familiar face, I saw Edith, Bonnie, and Ada. No Klaus. The attempted rescue of the German boy of 17 Norden Lane had failed. I took Maura’s outstretched hand and stood up. She brushed the dirt off my back and gave me a comforting smile. Hands rubbed my back as started to walk away. My dad would be worried about me I told myself, no reason to stay.

“Jacqueline...It’s not your fault.” Maura said.

“I know. I just wish it worked.” I replied.

The hands slowly left my back as I walked farther away. I gazed into the night, walking slowly, as if in a trance. My hands opened the familiar door to the apartment, and I stepped inside to the warm inside air. My father slept on the bed. Two pieces of paper laid on the desk next to him. I reached out and grabbed the thin slips of paper. Our flight to America was scheduled for tomorrow. I was leaving tomorrow. I placed my bag beside my bed and slowly climbed in as my mind digested this information. Thoughts cluttered my brain as I tried to sleep. But I just couldn’t. His blue eyes stricken with fear haunted my dreams. I rustled around in my bag and took out its contents. My fingers grabbed the lone picture left inside. To my surprise, I realized that I had given Klaus the wrong picture. I had given him the picture of myself staring out into the sunset. For a few moments, I allowed myself to gaze at the candid shot of Klaus. A slight smile graced his features as he read his book. The petals that flowed around him framed the scene perfectly. He looked peaceful, nothing like he had looked in East Berlin. I squeezed my eyes tightly, trying to forget the horrors of the day. My eyes grew heavy as I opened them back up, and I fell asleep to the picture of Klaus in the Sakura trees. Two things Berlin would never see again. Love and peace, all lost in one day. Lost to a wall dedicated to terror. Lost to the horrors of the Berlin Wall.

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Attribution of Research

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* Sakura trees represent peace
* The trees have pink flowers
* I changed this fact, Sakura trees were originally planted in Berlin in the 1980’s.

"History Hall - Canon Camera Story 1955-1969." *History Hall - Canon Camera Story*

*1955-1969*. N.p., n.d. Web. 01 Mar. 2015.

* A popular camera during this time was the CanonFlex

"Top German Baby Names Germany 1960s." *BabyMed*. N.p., 17 Nov. 2012. Web. 11 Feb.

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* Klaus
* Maura
* Frank
* Fritz
* Freja
* Edith
* Bonnie
* Ada

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* *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee was a popular novel in the 1960’s.

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* 89,000 German immigrants fled from East Berlin to West Berlin in 1961.
* Soviets created a blockade in Berlin in attempt to starve out Western powers in 1948.
* The Wall had guard dogs and humans, trained to kill on site.
* Wall was 12 feet high, 4 feet wide.
* 7 ½ miles long.
* Wall was built on August 13th, 1961.
* Wall contained the “Death Strip” with sand, floodlights, and machine guns.

"Berlin after 1945." *- Berlin.de*. N.p., n.d. Web. 06 Feb. 2015.

* Tierpark Zoo is opened in Berlin in 1955.
* 600,000 apartments destroyed after WW2
* 2.8 million residents still lived in Berlin after war.

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* Students were main source of smugglers through the wall.
* Smuggle immigrants through the tunnels underground with maps.

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* Walter Ulbricht and Nikita Khrushchev ordered the construction of the Wall in 1961.
* The Wall was initially barbed wire for a few weeks.
* Soviets controlled the East, Western powers controlled the West. (Berlin).
* East Berlin called the wall the “*Antifaschistischer Schutzwall”.*

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* Cold War took place during 1947-1991

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* A University in Berlin during the 1960’s-Present.

"Berlin: August Weather Averages." *August Weather Averages for Berlin, Germany*.

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* Rains about 56% of the time in Berlin.
* Average temp is 18 degrees celsius.

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* “Die Sukar Bäume im Wind flossen , meine Augen folgten dem Sonnenaufgang, es war en schöner Morgen”. (The Sukar trees in the wind flowed , my eyes followed the sunrise, it was a beautiful morning)
* “Ein, not en”.
* “Ja”. (Yes)
* “Komm Runter”. (Come down)
* “Folge Mir”. (Follow me)
* “Danke”. (Thank you)
* “Hallo”. (Hello)
* “Für Berlin! Für Rechten! Für den Frieden!” (For Berlin, for rights, for peace)
* “HÖR AUF”. (Stop)